

VZCZCXRO6337
OO RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHAK #0354 0561218
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 251218Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5341
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/39ABG CP INCIRLIK AB TU IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/425ABG IZMIR TU//CC// IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH// IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA/DSCA//
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS ANKARA 000354

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY/IRAQ SITREP 4: GROUND OPERATIONS, MILITARY
ANNOUNCEMENT, PRESS COMMENT

REF: A. ANKARA 0331
[1](#)B. ANKARA 0340
[1](#)C. ANKARA 0343

[1](#)1. (SBU) Turkish ground operations in the Zap-Metina area of northern Iraq continue, with Turkish troops supported by artillery and air strikes as well as helicopter gunships. Weather in the objective area is expected to deteriorate significantly over the next 24-48 hours, limiting air operations. Commercial and sustainment vehicle traffic at the Habur Gate crossing between Turkey and Iraq remains at normal levels. President Gul received a briefing at the Turkish General Staff (TGS) on the ongoing operations on February 25.

[1](#)2. (U) TGS reported on February 24 that Turkish troops continue to engage in close combat and continue to destroy PKK shelters, weapons, ammunition, and supplies. According to the TGS, a total of 112 PKK terrorists, including leadership figures, have been killed in fighting as of February 24. Eight Turkish troops were reported killed on February 24. A TGS announcement claimed that the PKK are booby-trapping the bodies of dead PKK terrorists in order to cause casualties among Turkish forces. The Turkish military is investigating the crash of one of its helicopters in the border region. The announcement also alleges that the military pressure is causing infighting and fratricide among PKK members.

[1](#)3. (U) Turkish newspapers continue to speculate on the size, scope, and duration of the ground operation. Ercan Citlioglu speculates in mainstream Sabah that the land operation will continue for two months and Turkish units will return to Turkey in April. He adds that "The U.S. has not voiced objections to the Turkish operations and this shows that the process of liquidating Masoud Barzani has begun." Meanwhile, Enis Berberoglu writes in mainstream Hurriyet that the number of Turkish combat troops in northern Iraq was limited to a few thousand, indicating the operation would be short in scope and duration. Murat Yetkin writes in liberal Radikal that the ground operations initiated last week proves that the U.S. is serious about helping Turkey against the PKK. Kemalist Cumhuriyet asserts that the Turkish army will advance 50 kilometers into Iraq and Istanbul's Kanal 7 TV is reporting that elite Turkish troops have already landed at the PKK's Qandil mountain redoubt. Turkish papers have also picked up stories from Kurdish media alleging that 70 U.S.

Army tanks and HUMMVs are moving towards Dohuk, while a Peshmerga spokesperson has denied that story.

¶4. (U) According to mainstream Hurriyet, Turkish business groups support the ground operation. While they anticipate it may slow trade with Iraq in the short term, they believe that improved security will benefit Turkey-Iraq trade over the longer term.

¶5. (U) Turkish media are also reporting that U.S. Defense Secretary Gates, scheduled to visit Ankara February 27-28,

SIPDIS

stated that the operation should be kept short and urged the Turkish government to adopt political and economic measures to keep the PKK from winning the support of Turkey's Kurdish population. Columnists across the political spectrum continue to point out that cross-border operations alone will not solve the problem and urge the government to undertake comprehensive political, economic, and social measures to address the Kurdish issue, including 24-hour Kurdish language broadcasting.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turkey>

WILSON